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IN A SOCIETY WHERE MUTANTS AND FORMER MUTANTS ALIKE FEEL THREATENED BY THE WORLD AROUND THEM, THEY TURN TO THEIR FIRST, BEST LINE OF DEFENSE WHENEVER TROUBLE ARISES: X-FACTOR, THE PRIVATE DETECTIVE AGENCY FOUNDED BY MADROX, THE MULTIPLE MAN.

X-FACTOR

PREVIOUSLY...

X-FACTOR INVESTIGATIONS HAS RELOCATED TO DETROIT. FOR THEIR FIRST PAYING JOB THEY WERE TASKED BY HECTOR MUNOZ WITH FINDING HIS SON DARWIN, THE PALE SKINNED MUTANT WITH EVOLUTIONARY POWERS. AFTER FINDING DARWIN, THEY HAD A BRIEF AND VIOLENT ENCOUNTER WITH SHE-HULK AND A SKRULL AGENT DISGUISED AS FORMER X-MAN LONGSHOT.

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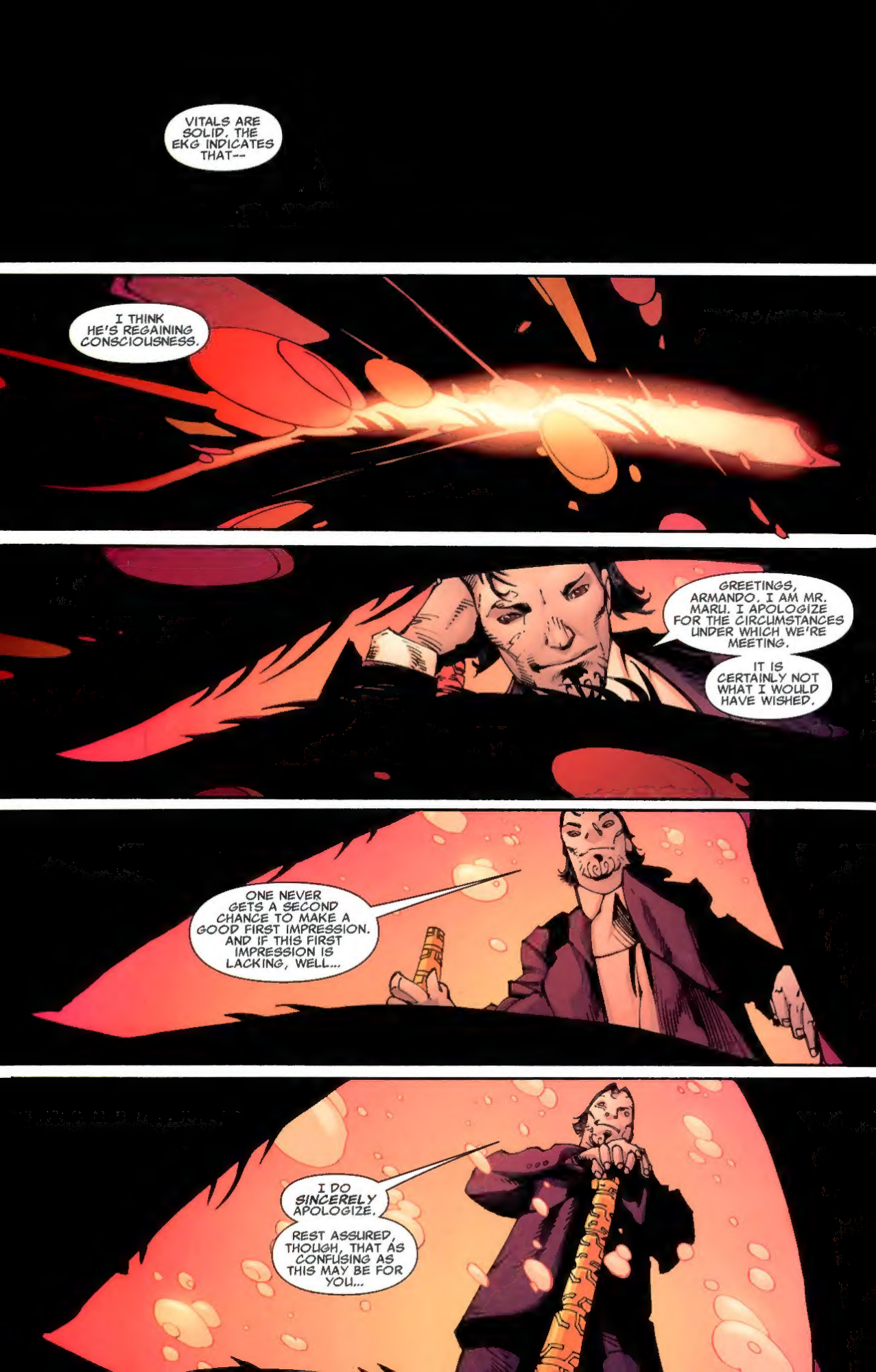
VITALS ARE SOLID. THE EKG INDICATES THAT--
I THINK HE'S REGAINING CONSCIOUSNESS.
GREETINGS, ARMANDO. I AM MR. MARU. I APOLOGIZE FOR THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH WE'RE MEETING.
IT IS CERTAINLY NOT WHAT I WOULD HAVE WISHED.
ONE NEVER GETS A SECOND CHANCE TO MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION. AND IF THIS FIRST IMPRESSION IS LACKING, WELL...
I DO SINCERELY APOLOGIZE.
REST ASSURED, THOUGH, THAT AS CONFUSING AS THIS MAY BE FOR YOU...

BEST INTENTIONS

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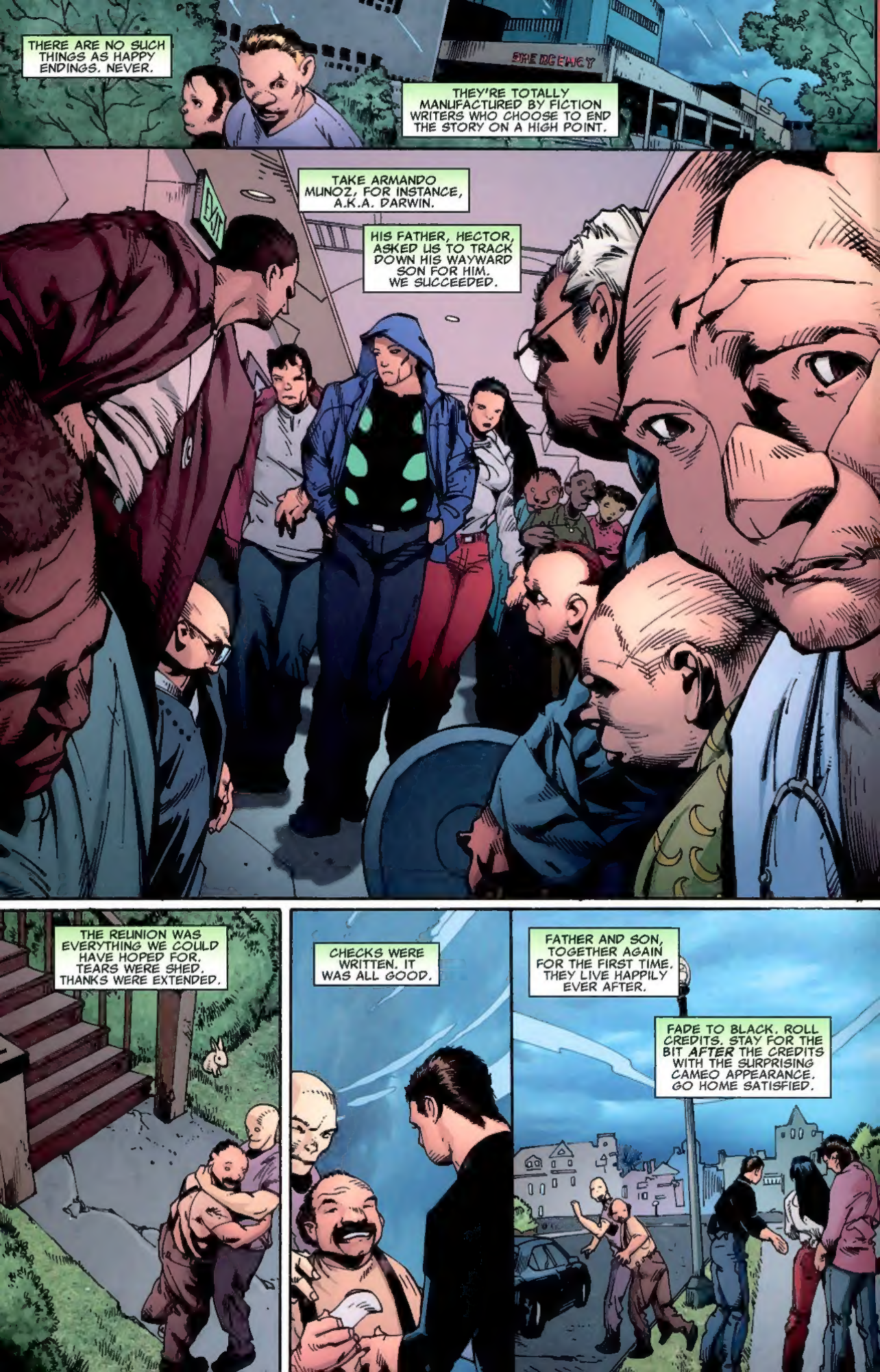

THERE ARE NO SUCH THINGS AS HAPPY ENDINGS. NEVER.
THEY'RE TOTALLY MANUFACTURED BY FICTION WRITERS WHO CHOOSE TO END THE STORY ON A HIGH POINT.
TAKE ARMANDO MUNOZ, FOR INSTANCE, A.K.A. DARWIN.
HIS FATHER, HECTOR, ASKED US TO TRACK DOWN HIS WAYWARD SON FOR HIM. WE SUCCEEDED.
THE REUNION WAS EVERYTHING WE COULD HAVE HOPED FOR. TEARS WERE SHED. THANKS WERE EXTENDED.
CHECKS WERE WRITTEN. IT WAS ALL GOOD.
FATHER AND SON, TOGETHER AGAIN FOR THE FIRST TIME. THEY LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER.
FADE TO BLACK. ROLL CREDITS. STAY FOR THE BIT *AFTER* THE CREDITS WITH THE SURPRISING CAMEO APPEARANCE. GO HOME SATISFIED.

HERE'S THE PROBLEM WITH REAL LIFE...
YOU XF INVESTIGATIONS?
YEAH, YOU'RE LIEUTENANT WEISS?
YUP.
GO ON IN.
IT'S NOT LIKE THE MOVIES.
IT KEEPS GOING PAST THE HAPPY ENDING.
THE PROBLEM IS THAT, SOONER OR LATER, EVERYTHING TURNS TO CRAP, AND YOU JUST FIND YOURSELF HOPING THAT IT'S LATER RATHER THAN SOONER.
IN THIS CASE, FAR TOO SOON.

YOU KNOW HIM?
HECTOR MUNOZ. HE WAS A CLIENT OF OURS.
HOW DID YOU KNOW TO CALL US?
HIS CHECKBOOK. THERE WAS A CARBON IMPRINT THAT HAD YOUR AGENCY'S NAME ON IT INSIDE, MADE OUT THE DAY HE WAS FOUND.
WHERE WAS HE FOUND?
BRIGHTMOOR, JUST OFF SCHOOLCRAFT ROAD.
AND HE WAS ALONE?
JUST HIM AND GOD, APPARENTLY.
BULLET TO THE BRAIN. DOCTORS HAVE NO IDEA HOW HE'S STILL ALIVE.
HE WON'T BE PROVIDING ANY ANSWERS, SO I WAS HOPING YOU MIGHT.
STARTING WITH YOUR NAME.
JAMIE MADROX. FAMED MUTANT. I WAS IN ALL THE PAPERS DURING THE REGISTRATION WARS, SPEAKING OUT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. OH, AND I HELPED BLOW UP MUTANT TOWN.
JOHN MADDOX.
AND WHAT DID YOU DO FOR MR. MUNOZ, JOHN?
FOUND HIS SON.
HIS SON WASN'T WITH HIM.
THEN I GUESS WE DID A LOUSY JOB.
M. SEE WHAT YOU CAN FIND.

WHAT IS *SHE* SUPPOSED TO BE? SOME SORT OF PSYCHIC?
SOME SORT, YEAH.
WE'VE HAD A FEW OF HER TYPE SHOW UP WHEN KIDS GO MISSING.
HEADLINE SEEKERS, MOSTLY. NEVER TURNED UP A TIP WORTH A DAMN.
THAT WHO YOU PEOPLE ARE? HEADLINE SEEKERS?
ACTUALLY, DETECTIVE, WE'D JUST AS SOON KEEP A LOW PROFILE.
M, WHAT'VE YOU *GOT*?
M?
NOTHING... *JOHN.*
TOO MUCH BRAIN DAMAGE. IT'S LIKE TRYING TO READ A CD THAT SOMEONE POUNDED WITH A MALLET.
WELL, WELL. THE PSYCHIC HAS AN EXCUSE. ISN'T THAT CONVENIENT.
ACTUALLY, IT'S DAMNED *INCONVENIENT.*

IF MONET HAD BEEN ABLE TO SCAN HIS MIND, IT MIGHT HAVE GIVEN US SOME SORT OF DIRECTION. AS IT IS...
...WE'RE LEFT HOPING OPPORTUNITY WILL COME KNOCKING.
KNOK KNOK
YEAH?
HELLO, I'M LOOKING FOR--
YOU!
WELL...YES, ACTUALLY, IN A SENSE, I AM LOOKING FOR--
OHHH, NOT GOOD.

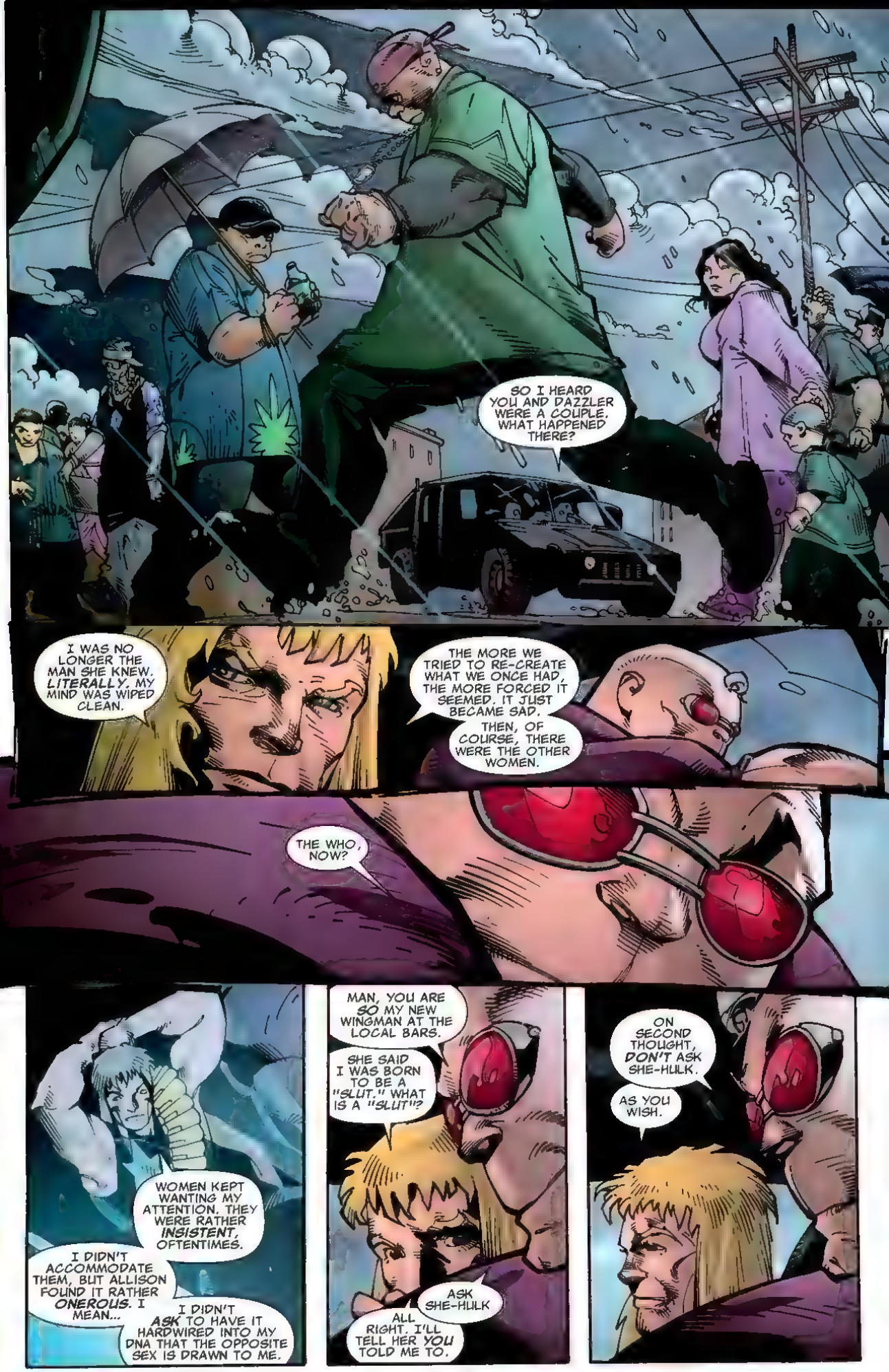
HOW STUPID DO YOU THINK WE ARE?!?
I...I DON'T KNOW. HOW STUPID DO YOU WANT ME TO THINK YOU ARE?
I CAN TRY TO BE ACCOMMODATING...
GUIDO! WHAT ARE YOU DOING--?
IT'S THAT SKRULL! THINKING HE'LL MAKE US BELIEVE HE'S LONGSHOT AGAIN!
YOU BELIEVE I AM A SKRULL. BECAUSE YOU RAN INTO A SKRULL WHO LOOKED LIKE ME.
'ZACTLY!
OF COURSE. BECAUSE A SKRULL CAN LOOK LIKE ANYBODY.
RIGHT!
SO IF I WERE A SKRULL...
WHICH' YA ARE!
AND COULD LOOK LIKE ANYBODY...
WHICH YA CAN!
WHY WOULD I CHOOSE TO LOOK LIKE SOMEONE WHOM YOU KNOW TO BE A SKRULL?
...
WHEN I COULD LOOK LIKE ANYONE ELSE AND AVOID SUSPICION. I MEAN... WOULDN'T THAT BE RATHER STUPID?
I...
GRANTED, IT COULD BE A DOUBLE-BLUFF, BUT IT'S FAIRLY UNLIKELY, DON'T YOU THINK?

I MEAN, WHY PRETEND TO BE LONGSHOT TO MAKE YOU THINK I'M NOT LONGSHOT WHEN I ACTUALLY--
SHUT 'IM UP! HE'S MAKIN' MY HEAD HURT!
MAYBE IF YOU LET GO OF HIM...
THANK YOU.
YOU SURE ABOUT THIS, SY?
DEPENDS ON HIS ANSWERS. WHY ARE YOU HERE, LONGSHOT?
BECAUSE OF THIS. AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT...
...MY LUCK, ANYWAY...
THE WIRE SERVICES PICKED THIS UP.
THE STORY FAILS TO IDENTIFY ANYONE IN THE PHOTO, BUT I OBVIOUSLY RECOGNIZED ME...
OR AT LEAST SOMEONE POSING AS ME.
SO I THOUGHT I'D COME TO TOWN, POKE AROUND...SEE IF I COULD FIND OUT WHY I WAS HERE WHEN I KNOW I WASN'T.

HOW DID YOU KNOW TO COME TO US? BECAUSE WE'RE MUTANTS?
I HAD NO IDEA XF WAS MUTANT-RUN UNTIL I SAW STRONG GUY AND YOU, SIRYN. AND THERE'S CERTAINLY A GOOD DEAL MORE OF YOU TO SEE.
VERY FUNNY.
WHO'S THE FATHER?
JAMIE MADROX. HE'S THE HEAD OF OUR LITTLE AGENCY.
I SEE. WELL, WORD ON THE STREET IS XF INVESTIGATIONS IS THE GO-TO PLACE FOR UNUSUAL CASES. SO I DECIDED TO GO-TO.
WHERE IS MADROX, ANYWAY? I SHOULD EXTEND MY CONGRATULATIONS.
HE'S AT THE HOSPITAL.
THE POLICE CALLED. SOMETHING INVOLVING ONE OF OUR CASES.
I SHOULD GO.
STICK AROUND. I THINK JAMIE WILL WANT T--
I MEAN TO THE HOSPITAL. I SHOULD GO THERE.
WHAT? WHY?
JUST A HUNCH. AND I TEND TO TRUST MY HUNCHES.
FINE. I'LL DRIVE YA THERE.
JUST PROMISE NOT T'EXPLAIN AGAIN WHY YOU AIN'T A SKRULL.

MR. WENZEL WAS SERVING A LIFE SENTENCE UPSTATE, BUT HE VOLUNTEERED TO BE PART OF OUR PROGRAM, ARMANDO.
HE DOUBTLESS FELT HE HAD NOTHING TO LOSE.
YOU HAVE TO ADMIRE THAT SORT OF THINKING.
SOME OF THE GREATEST ADVANCEMENTS IN MAN'S HISTORY HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED BY THOSE WHO HAD NOTHING TO LOSE.
WE WILL, OF COURSE, BE OBSERVING MR. WENZEL FOR THE NEXT FORTY-EIGHT HOURS.
HOWEVER, IT COULD BE A WEEK OR MORE BEFORE WE SEE ANY--
AH. ALL RIGHT.
THAT'S A BIT SOONER THAN EXPECTED.
PULSE IS THROUGH THE ROOF! TWO HUNDRED OVER NINETY!
BODY TEMPERATURE SPIKING TO 104!
IN JUST SECONDS? HOW IS THAT POSSI--?
AARRHHH!!

EEYYARRRR!!
GET IT OUT OF ME! GET IT OUUUT! GET IT--
HMMM.
WE'RE GOING TO REQUIRE FAR MORE TEST SUBJECTS THAN ORIGINALLY ESTIMATED IF THIS KEEPS UP.


SO I HEARD YOU AND DAZZLER WERE A COUPLE. WHAT HAPPENED THERE?
I WAS NO LONGER THE MAN SHE KNEW. LITERALLY. MY MIND WAS WIPED CLEAN.
THE MORE WE TRIED TO RE-CREATE WHAT WE ONCE HAD, THE MORE FORCED IT SEEMED. IT JUST BECAME SAD.
THEN, OF COURSE, THERE WERE THE OTHER WOMEN.
THE WHO, NOW?
WOMEN KEPT WANTING MY ATTENTION. THEY WERE RATHER INSISTENT, OFTENTIMES.
I DIDN'T ACCOMMODATE THEM, BUT ALLISON FOUND IT RATHER ONEROUS. I MEAN...
I DIDN'T ASK TO HAVE IT HARDWIRED INTO MY DNA THAT THE OPPOSITE SEX IS DRAWN TO ME.
MAN, YOU ARE SO MY NEW WINGMAN AT THE LOCAL BARS.
SHE SAID I WAS BORN TO BE A "SLUT." WHAT IS A "SLUT"?
ASK SHE-HULK
ALL RIGHT. I'LL TELL HER YOU TOLD ME TO.
ON SECOND THOUGHT, DON'T ASK SHE-HULK.
AS YOU WISH.

"I'LL SAY THIS FOR YA, LONGSHOT...YA SURE GOT A WAY WITH PEOPLE."
HE'S A FREAKING SKRULL!
:UNFF: OH, NOT AGAIN!
DON'T BE AN IDIOT. SKRULLS CAN DISGUISE THEMSELVES AS ANYONE. WHY WOULD HE IMPERSONATE SOMEONE WE ALREADY KNOW TO BE A SKRULL?
HUH?
HERE. THIS SHOULD HELP. SIRYN WROTE IT DOWN SO I COULD KEEP IT STRAIGHT.
IGNORE RICTOR. HE THINKS WITH HIS FISTS. I'M MONET ST. CROIX.
YES, I KNOW.
I KNOW YOU KNOW. SO...
HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO BE IN TOWN?
WELL, I COULD EXTEND MY STAY IF YOU'D LIKE.
I COULD SHOW YOU SOME SIGHTS.

YEAH, I'LL BET YOU COULD.
C'MERE, CASANOVA.
I KNOW WHAT YOU WERE JUST.
BUT WE WERE JUST--
HEY, ST. CROIX, COULD YOU WALK ME THROUGH TH--?
DROP DEAD.
RIGHT.
LONGSHOT. TERRY CALLED TO TELL ME YOU WERE ON YOUR WAY.
YOU MADE QUITE AN IMPRESSION ON HER.
HE DOES THAT SOMETIMES.
WHO'S THIS? ANOTHER--
--PSY...
...chic?
HI. I'M DETECTIVE LIEUTENANT WEISS.
I'M LONGSHOT. HELLO, DETECTIVE LIEUTENANT WEISS.
CALL ME LESLIE. PLEASE.
ALL RIGHT, LESLIE.
OH, HOLY CRAP.

TELL ME, DETECTIVE...DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING BELONGING TO THIS POOR MAN?
SOME OBJECT OF HIS?
HIS CHECKBOOK. WILL THIS DO? I HOPE IT DOES.
THAT WOULD BE TERRIFIC, THANKS. WOULD YOU MIND STEPPING OUT...?
YES, YES, OF COURSE. AND IF THERE'S ANYTHING ELSE I CAN DO...
ABSOLUTELY, I'LL LET YOU KNOW.
CALL ME...
WAIT, LET ME GIVE YOU MY HOME NUM--
AW, BROTHER.
SLAM
I'M AMAZED DAZZLER LET YA GO.
REALLY?
YEAH. IF I WERE HER, I'D PROBABLY HAVE KILLED YA FIRST.
I'M GONNA WAIT OUTSIDE WITH YOUR FAN CLUB.

SUPPOSEDLY, LONGSHOT CAN GET PSYCHIC "READS" OFF OBJECTS. I'VE NEVER ACTUALLY SEEN IT IN ACTION, BUT I SUPPOSE IT'S NO WEIRDER THAN ANYTHING ELSE HE DOES.
WELL? ANYTHING?
LONGSHOT?
THE CHECK I GAVE YOU WAS ENOUGH, MR. MADROX?
MORE THAN.
GOOD LUCK TO YOU, SIR.
AND TO YOU.
I'M GOING TO KEEP CALLING YOU GUYS. CHECKING IN...
AND WE'LL BE PUTTING FEELERS OUT FOR XAVIER. IF WE TURN ANYTHING UP, WE'LL TELL YOU.
EXCELLENT.
HUNH. EVERY SO OFTEN, WE HAVE A CLEAN WIN. FEELS GOOD, IT MAKES YOU--
HAVE TO PEE.
NOT... REALLY.
IT DOES ME. AGAIN. THANKS TO YOUR KID.

YOU DIDN'T USE TO ANNOUNCE WHENEVER YOU HAD TO GO TO THE BATHROOM!
IT DIDN'T *USED* TO BE *YOUR* FAULT.
SO WHERE'RE WE GOING, POP? YOU GOT A CAR AROUND HERE, OR...?
ACTUALLY, ARMANDO, I'VE ARRANGED FOR A RIDE...
HUH?
WHAT THE HELL--? *HEY--!*
WHERE'S MY MONEY? HALF A MILLION IF I DELIVERED MY SON TO YOU. THAT'S WHAT YOU PROMISED. HALF A--
YOU'LL HAVE TO SETTLE FOR THE THANKS OF THE KARMA PROJECT.

BLAM
MKA-213

LONGSHOT?
MKA-213.
WHAT?
THAT WAS THE LAST THING HE SAW BEFORE HIS CONSCIOUSNESS WENT. THE LICENSE NUMBER ON A VAN.
AND THE MAN WHO SHOT HIM SAID SOMETHING ABOUT THE KARMA PROJECT, RIGHT BEFORE THEY MADE OFF WITH DARWIN.
SOMEONE KIDNAPPED HIM? WHY?
I DO NOT KNOW. BUT WHOEVER IT IS, THEY PROMISED THIS MAN A HALF MILLION DOLLARS IF HE TURNED HIS SON OVER TO THEM.
SON OF A--!
GUN.
LANGUAGE, JAMES, PLEASE.
WHATEVER.
THERESA? YEAH, MADROX. LOOK...
MR. MUNOZ...

I NEED YOU TO RUN A CHECK ON A LICENSE TAG--
MKA-231...
213.
SORRY, MKA-213.
ALSO SEE IF YOU CAN DIG UP ANYTHING ON "THE KARMA PROJECT."
NO, NOT THE THING FROM "LOST." KARMA. LIKE FROM THE NEW MUTANTS.
WHAT ARE YOU--
NOTHING, BOSS.
SURE DIDN'T LOOK LIKE "NOTHING." THAT'S IT, YOU'RE DONE.
FWOOSH
HE WASN'T FLUFFING THAT PILLOW.

OH MY GOD.
NURSE!
MADROX? WHAT'S WRONG? WHAT WAS HE--?
HE'S CODING!
EVERYBODY OUT OF THE ROOM! NOW!
CHARGING... CHARGING...
CLEAR!
ZHHHHF
WELL?
HE'S BACK. HEART AND BLOOD PRESSURE ARE STABILIZING. YOU DID IT, DOCTOR.
WOULD HAVE BEEN A SMALL LOSS, IF YOU ASK ME. THE MAN SOLD OUT HIS SON.
YEAH. YOU'RE... YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT.
OH MY GOD.
TO BE CONTINUED...

ZONE, MEGAN AND RESIN